

THE TREE OF LIFE CYCLE

A Guideline to Life Cycle Events and Current Customs

at

Tree of Life Congregation

2018



TOL LIFE CYCLE
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INTRODUCTION

This Guideline outlines the current customs and practices at Tree of Life Congregation. It does not begin to describe all the many ways to celebrate life cycle events, nor does it try to answer everyone's questions about their lifecycle events. We strongly encourage everyone to discuss their lifecycle events with the Rabbi as early as possible. We have included a suggested reading list that can point you to different Jewish observances and their origins. This Guideline does give you the basic "house traditions" that we at Tree of Life have developed over the years. For centuries, each synagogue has developed its own "minhag hamakom" or web of individual customs. These are ours and we invite you to join in them.

This Guideline is for everyone who might like to share their Jewish life with the Tree of Life family or simply make use of our facilities. We welcome new members of our congregation, those who are considering joining us, and wish to give them a sense of what we have to offer. Those who have been with us for a while may not yet have celebrated a particular life cycle event at Tree of Life and may need to learn what is expected and who does what.

Many of these guidelines have grown over the years, authored by Tree of Life rabbis, officers, teachers and members. The Tree of Life Ritual Committees have gathered together our existing customs and practices and have "filled in the blanks" where needed. This has been an ongoing task over the years and this document represents the current thinking.

As a member of the Union for Reform Judaism, the Tree of Life Rabbi generally follows the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) guidelines for worship and various lifecycle events. We encourage people seeking further information to contact the Tree of Life Rabbi and to search the URJ's website at www.reformjudaism.org.

We hope you find these Guidelines useful and welcome any comments and suggestions you may have for future editions.

| Original Ritual Committee | Participants in 2001 Revision | Participants in 2005 Revision | Participants in 2014 Revision |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Jeanette Birch | Claire Boxt | Cheri Alexander | Richard Cohen |
| Irene Fields | Norma Higgins | Eleanor Bornstein | Terry Garber |
| Terry Garber | Sally Hein Langer | Nancy Cartiff | David Greenhouse |
| Jonathan Leader | Deborah Ritter | Jennifer Stein | Steve Savitz |
| Rabbi Sanford Marcus Sherman | Ruth Zackowitz Hartman | Risa Straus | Rabbi Daniel |
| Jennifer Mykytyn | | | |
| Arline Polinsky | | | |
| Steve Savitz | | | |

Participants in 2016 Revision

Alice Kasakoff Adams

Jessica Elfenbein

David Greenhouse

Josh Gupta-Kagan

Rabbi Linda Joseph

Steve Savitz

TREE OF LIFE VISION STATEMENT

In May 1997, Tree of Life Congregation adopted the following Vision Statement. It describes the congregation as it would like to be – as we would like to see ourselves and hope others will see us.

**In our devotion to God,
the Tree of Life Congregation
will be recognized as a synagogue
that fully meets the needs of
the Reform Jewish Community
of the Midlands of South Carolina
by:**

- **Offering pathways for individuals to grow closer to God;**
- **Providing a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for those observing Reform Judaism, and their families, partners, and others;**
- **Developing a comprehensive, life-long Jewish education program embodying meaningful, stimulating experiences for all ages;**
- **Preserving and celebrating Reform Jewish culture and identity;**
- **Cultivating the leadership potential of each congregant;**
- **Enjoying ample financial resources to sustain the TOL vision, while exercising fiscal responsibility and sound business practices;**
- **Serving as a source of strength and support for each other in times of need;**
- **Working as advocates for Reform Judaism in the community-at-large;**
- **Demonstrating Jewish consciousness through empathy and social action.**

THE RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS and LIFE CYCLE BOOK

SHABBAT

The Sabbath is the weekly holiday central to Jewish life. Shabbat is an integral part of the Creation story in Genesis 2:1-3: "The heaven and earth were finished, and all their array. On the seventh day God finished the work which God had been doing, and God ceased [rested] on the seventh day from all the work which God had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased [rested] from all the work of creation which God had done." Shabbat is also the only holiday mentioned in the Ten Commandments, first in Exodus 20:8-11 and later in Deuteronomy 5:12-15.

The celebration of Shabbat takes place both privately (at home) and communally (at synagogue). Our Tree of Life community gathers for worship each Shabbat, reaffirming our covenantal tie to God and to one another. Shabbat services take place every Friday night at Tree of Life and on Saturday morning at least once each month. Historically, there has been a Torah service at every Shabbat service (both on Friday night and Saturday morning). Starting in 2016, when there is Saturday morning worship, a talk or sermon will replace the Friday night Torah reading the evening before, moving TOL towards common Reform movement practice.

WELCOMING A CHILD INTO THE COVENANT & BABYNAMING CEREMONIES

Q: What is a covenant ceremony?

We celebrate the birth of every Jewish child. It is a wonderful *simcha* – a truly joyous occasion. Parents are obligated to bring their children into the Jewish covenant. We do this with a special ceremony of welcoming. For boys, we have a *Brit Milah* ceremony; for girls, we have a *Hachnasat Bat LaBrit* ceremony.

Q: What is a *Brit Milah* ceremony for boys?

Brit Milah means "the covenant of circumcision." This is the ceremony at which a Jewish baby boy is welcomed into the Jewish family, entered into our people's covenant with God, circumcised, blessed, and given his Hebrew name. This ceremony is more than just a babynaming.

Q: What is a *Hachnasat Bat LaBrit* ceremony for girls?

Hachnasat Bat LaBrit means "entering a daughter into the Covenant." This is the ceremony at which a Jewish baby girl is welcomed into the Jewish family, entered into our people's covenant with God, blessed, and given her Hebrew name. Other names for

this ceremony include *Brit Bat* (Covenant for a Daughter) or *Brit Banot Yisrael* (Covenant of the Daughters of Israel), or *Brit Chayim* (Covenant of Life). This ceremony is more than just a baby naming.

Q: How do I prepare for a covenant ceremony?

Please consult with the Rabbi before the baby is born. The Rabbi will be happy to discuss the ceremony in detail and to go over options with you.

Q: What are the options for a covenant ceremony for a boy baby?

We encourage a *Brit Milah* (also called a *bris*) ceremony for all boy babies. The *Brit Milah* ceremony traditionally takes place on the 8th day of life (the date of birth counts as the first day – therefore, if the baby is born on a Tuesday, the *Brit Milah* ceremony would be on the following Tuesday), as we are commanded in the book of Genesis. Please note that because of the importance of this mitzvah, a *Brit Milah* ceremony may take place on Shabbat or on a holiday. However, this assumes that the baby is healthy enough for the circumcision. If there is any question as to the health of the child, the circumcision can and should be postponed.

Most often, a *Brit Milah* ceremony will take place in the home of the newborn (or at the home of family members). The ceremony can also be held in the Temple or in a community room.

The person who performs the circumcision is called a “*mohe*l” or “*mohelet*.” The Rabbi will go over with you *mohe*l options, including: (1) bringing in a professional *mohe*l from out-of-town, (2) using a Jewish doctor in Columbia, or (3) using your obstetrician or pediatrician.

Some families prefer to separate the circumcision from the covenant ceremony. This often means having the baby circumcised before leaving the hospital or at the doctor’s office before the 8th day. A separate covenant ceremony with the Rabbi should then follow.

Q: When should a covenant ceremony take place?

As noted above, a *Brit Milah* ceremony traditionally takes place on the 8th day. It is traditional to hold any covenant ceremony, for a boy or girl, on the 8th day. However, a covenant ceremony may take place at any time, especially if this will facilitate having out-of-town family members and friends present at the ceremony. It is recommended that such a ceremony take place as soon as possible: preferably within the first 30 days of life, and almost always during the baby’s first year.

Q: What is a private covenant ceremony?

A private covenant ceremony, for either a baby boy or girl, is held in the family home or at Temple at any time (often in the morning, around noon, or after work) except on Shabbat or other major holidays. The family may invite anyone they would like to such a ceremony.

Q: What is a public covenant ceremony?

A public covenant ceremony, for either a baby boy or girl, takes place at Temple during a Shabbat worship service, usually on a Friday evening. This also provides the family the opportunity to share their *simcha* (joy) with the entire congregation, which is a wonderful occasion. We encourage families to consider this option; the congregation always looks forward to a covenant ceremony and welcoming the newest addition to our Tree of Life family. The Rabbi will try to schedule the ceremony for a Shabbat on which no other life cycle events are being observed.

It is customary for the family to contribute to or augment the *Oneg Shabbat* reception following services.

CONSECRATION

Q: What is Consecration?

Consecration is our congregation's special service of welcome for our newest Religious School students. Parents consecrate their children to the study of Torah and of the Jewish faith and traditions. The Consecration ceremony marks the beginning of the formal Jewish education for these students.

Q: Who is consecrated?

All of our first-year students participate in Consecration. Even students in older classes who are beginning at the Tree of Life Religious School and have not been previously been consecrated are invited to participate.

Q: When is Consecration?

The Consecration ceremony takes place during a congregational worship service.

BAR MITZVAH & BAT MITZVAH

Q: What is a Bar Mitzvah?

“*Bar Mitzvah*” literally means a “son of God’s commandments.” When a young man becomes a Bar Mitzvah, he is publicly announcing his commitment to living a Jewish life and his acceptance of the obligation to live according to God’s teachings and commandments. A boy becomes a Bar Mitzvah at the age of 13. At this age, he is also considered responsible now for his own actions and decisions.

Q: What is a Bat Mitzvah?

“*Bat Mitzvah*” literally means a “daughter of God’s commandments.” When a young woman becomes a Bat Mitzvah, she is publicly announcing her commitment to living a Jewish life and her acceptance of the obligation to live according to God’s teachings and commandments. At the Tree of Life, a girl becomes a Bat Mitzvah at the age of 13. At this age, she is also considered responsible now for her own actions and decisions.

In some congregations, a Jewish girl may become a Bat Mitzvah at the age of 12. However, at the Tree of Life Congregation we are committed to equality with our boys and girls. The Bat Mitzvah service is the exact same as our Bar Mitzvah service. Therefore, we require a Bat Mitzvah to be 13 years old.

Q: What is a Bar/Bat Mitzvah service?

A Bar/Bat Mitzvah service is a Shabbat worship service to mark a young man becoming a Bar Mitzvah or a young woman becoming a Bat Mitzvah. At the service, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will lead the congregation in worship as well as read from the Torah for his/her first time.

A Bar/Bat Mitzvah service takes place either at a Shabbat Evening (Friday) or a Shabbat Morning (Saturday) worship service.

Q: Who is eligible for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah service?

In order to become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah at Temple, one must be a member of the Tree of Life Congregation, and a student in our Religious School and have studied for at least three years in our Religious School or in the Religious School of the family’s previous congregation.

Also, the family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah must be in good financial standing.

Q: When is the date for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah service scheduled?

Bar/Bat Mitzvah service dates are usually chosen one to two years in advance by the family in consultation with the Rabbi. The service is usually scheduled around the date of the student's 13th birthday.

Q: How does a student prepare to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

In addition to regular Religious School classes, each of our students works individually in a period of Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation for approximately nine months. During that time, the student will work with the Rabbi, the Religious School Director, and perhaps other tutors as designated by the Rabbi and Religious School Director.

**** PLEASE NOTE:** A formal Bar/Bat Mitzvah Orientation for students and families will be held prior to the 7th grade year. It is mandatory for the families of that year's B'nei Mitzvah class to attend the orientation session with the Rabbi and Religious School Director. Many details pertaining to preparation, the service itself, receptions, and more will be discussed at that time.

Q: Are there any fees associated with the Bar/Bat Mitzvah process?

All families are asked to pay a one-time fee at the beginning of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah year.

Q: What happens after a student becomes a Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

At the Tree of Life Congregation, all of our students remain in Religious School following one's Bar/Bat Mitzvah service and beyond. It is our expectation that students will continue through Confirmation in 10th grade, as well as serve as Teaching Assistants for the younger grades. We have special programs for our 11-12th grade students. In addition, we hope that our high school students will become part of our Temple Youth Group (COFTY).

Please see the TOL B'nei Mitzvah Handbook for more information.

CONFIRMATION

Q: What is Confirmation?

Confirmation is a very special service for our 10th grade Religious School class. Beginning in ninth grade, the class studies for two years with the Rabbi. The students confirm their commitment to living Jewish lives and to continuing their Jewish education.

Originally, the Confirmation Service was created in the Reform Movement as a replacement for Bar Mitzvah. Confirmation Class was a means of equally educating both the young men and women of the congregation and keeping them involved in the Religious School beyond age 13.

Today Confirmation continues to inspire and encourage the intellectual and spiritual growth of the young adults in our congregation while keeping them actively engaged in the life of the congregation as young adults.

Q: When is the Confirmation Service?

The Confirmation Service is held in the spring, near the Festival of Shavuot (typically in mid to late May or early June), the holiday that marks the anniversary of our people's receiving God's teachings and commandments at Mt. Sinai. The Confirmation Class leads this very special service for the Congregation.

Q: What is the Confirmation Class trip?

During the 10th grade year, the Confirmation Class will take a trip outside of South Carolina with the Rabbi to explore Jewish life in other places. The destination is often New York City. The trip is also a class-bonding activity, and all members of the class are expected and encouraged to participate.

WEDDINGS

Q: When may a Jewish wedding take place?

Jewish weddings may take place on most days EXCEPT the Sabbath and major Jewish holidays. Most Jewish weddings happen on a Saturday evening or Sunday.

Some Jews choose not to get married during the period of the *Omer* – the seven weeks in between the beginning of Passover and the holiday of Shavuot – or on other dates such as the Ninth of Av and certain other times. Couples are encouraged to discuss the date of their wedding with the Rabbi before booking a venue or vendors.

Q: What is *Kiddushin*?

Kiddushin is the traditional Hebrew word for marriage. It is derived from the word “*kadosh*” – meaning holy and reminds us of the holiness of the Jewish wedding ceremony and the sacred status of marriage.

Q: How does a couple prepare for a wedding?

The Rabbi loves to meet with couples as they prepare for their wedding. These meetings will include discussions on traditional Jewish views of marriage, getting to know each other better, as well as planning the wedding ceremony. In addition, all couples are encouraged to go through premarital counseling and preparation.

Q: Where do Jewish weddings take place?

A Jewish wedding ceremony can take place in a variety of settings. The preferred location is at the synagogue, especially the synagogue where one has grown up or is currently a member. The synagogue location helps to instill a feeling of *kiddushin*, holiness, into the ceremony.

Jewish weddings may also take place in a home, as well as in a hotel, restaurant, or banquet/meeting facility. The ceremony may take place inside or outdoors.

We encourage any couple who desires to discuss with the Rabbi having their ceremony take place in the Tree of Life Congregation's sanctuary. Our sanctuary is not limited to Congregation members or members' relatives, although we do encourage unaffiliated couples to consider joining our congregational community. The Rabbi must approve non-members' use of the sanctuary.

Q: Who officiates at a Jewish wedding?

Traditionally, a Rabbi and/or Cantor officiates at all Jewish weddings. The Rabbi of the Tree of Life Congregation officiates at weddings at the Tree of Life. Additional Jewish clergy may also officiate with the permission of the Rabbi.

Q: What is a *Ketubah*?

A *ketubah* is the traditional "marriage contract," signed by both bride and groom immediately prior to the wedding ceremony. It represents the couple's vows or promises to each other. Couples are encouraged to choose a *ketubah* carefully for both its text and artwork (traditionally the *ketubah* is framed and hung in the couple's home). The Rabbi will help a couple choose the right *ketubah*. A *ketubah* may be purchased at a Judaica shop or through on-line or catalogue retailers.

The *ketubah* does not replace a South Carolina marriage license, which must be obtained in advance and signed prior to the wedding ceremony.

Q: What is a *Chuppah*?

The *chuppah* is the traditional Jewish wedding canopy. It represents both God's sheltering presence in every marriage, as well as the Jewish home that the couple will now create. A *chuppah* can either be free-standing or held up on poles by four individuals. The *chuppah* may be as simple as a family *tallit* (prayer shawl) or as elaborate as a flowered canopy.

The Tree of Life Congregation has a beautiful *chuppah* for use in our sanctuary, as well as a portable *chuppah*. Many florists can also supply a *chuppah* for the wedding ceremony.

Q: What takes place in a Jewish wedding?

A Jewish wedding is a beautiful and sacred service. Traditionally it includes the following parts: welcoming the bride and groom, the exchange of rings and promises, the blessing over the wine, the *Sheva Berachot* – the seven wedding blessings, reading from the *Ketubah*, the priestly benediction, and the smashing of a glass.

Q: What is traditional Jewish music for a wedding?

Music has always been a traditional part of the Jewish wedding. It is encouraged to include Jewish music for the ceremony. Beautiful Jewish wedding music is perfect for the processional, for parts of the ceremony, and the recessional. Many of these pieces are settings of poetry from *Song of Songs*. If preferred, classical music may also be used with a preference for joyful and stately. Certain pieces, such as those written by Wagner (a notorious anti-Semite) including “Here Comes the Bride,” are discouraged.

Please consult with the Rabbi about appropriate music for the ceremony, as well as the availability of the Temple Music Director or other musicians.

Q: What is an *aufruf*?

An *aufruf* (pronounced oof-roof) is a wonderful opportunity for a public premarital blessing. At a Shabbat evening service during the wedding weekend or on a prior Shabbat, the couple is called up to the *bimah* for a special blessing. This also gives the congregation a chance to wish the wedding couple a *Mazal Tov* and to celebrate with them. An *aufruf* is optional, though highly recommended, regardless of whether the couple will be married at Tree of Life or if the Tree of Life Rabbi will perform the wedding.

Q: What do I do for an interfaith wedding ceremony?

The Tree of Life is a welcoming congregation made up of many interfaith families. The Rabbi is happy to work with interfaith couples and to help them plan their wedding ceremony and discuss how to establish a Jewish home and raise a Jewish family. Today there are many options available to interfaith couples. Interfaith couples are encouraged to discuss their upcoming wedding with the Rabbi.

Q: What is the Tree of Life Congregation's attitude towards same-sex wedding ceremonies?

The Tree of Life is a welcoming congregation to all. It is our sincere hope to be a supportive home for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender members and their families. In the Reform Movement, *kiddushin* is open to all. In that spirit, the congregation is open to and supportive of same-sex Jewish wedding ceremonies. The Rabbi will officiate at same-sex wedding ceremonies, and such *kiddushin* ceremonies are welcome to take place at the Temple.

CONVERSION

Q: Is conversion allowed in Judaism?

Yes, conversion to Judaism is allowed and has been taking place ever since the beginnings of our faith. It is an individual decision to convert to Judaism and must be made after a period of study and experience and of one's own free will.

Q: How does one convert to Judaism at the Tree of Life?

The conversion process is different for every individual. In general the process takes at least a year and requires much study. Interested individuals should take an *Introduction to Judaism* class approved by the Rabbi. They are also encouraged to become active in the life of the congregation: this includes regular Shabbat observance and service attendance, celebrating the holidays, and taking part in various Temple events.

Anyone who is interested in conversion to Judaism should consult with the Rabbi.

CHANUKAT HA-BAYIT – HOME DEDICATION

Q: What is a *Chanukat HaBayit* ceremony?

“*Chanukat HaBayit*” literally means “the dedication of a house.” It is the ceremony during which we affix the mezuzah and welcome the individual or family into his/her/their new home. The ceremony is an opportunity to invite guests into one's home for the first time and to dedicate the house as a home in which Judaism will be lived.

The home dedication ceremony can take place at any time, usually after one has moved in and begun to get settled into the new home. The Rabbi will be happy to help arrange and be present at such a ceremony – please consult with the Rabbi.

Q: What is a *mezuzah*?

The term *mezuzah* comes from the Hebrew word for “doorpost.” It is a holder – usually wood, ceramic, metal, or stone – that contains a handwritten scroll (*klaf*) on which are written passages from Deuteronomy 6: 4-9 and 11: 13-21. These passages include the words of the *Shema* as well as the command to write down God’s words and to place them on the doorposts of our houses. The *mezuzah* serves as a reminder to those who live in the home to find ways to follow God’s commandments every time they leave and enter the home. It is also an external sign letting passersby know that this is a Jewish home.

Traditionally the *mezuzah* is placed on the right-side doorpost (as you are facing the door) at approximately eye-level, with the top of the *mezuzah* leaning in towards the home. A special blessing is recited as the *mezuzah* is hung.

The *mezuzah* on the front door is the “official” *mezuzah* for the home. However, some people like to hang a *mezuzah* by any door leading to the outside or by indoor rooms, as well. Traditionally, a *mezuzah* may be placed on the doorpost of any room in which a person lives – for example, a bedroom. Traditionally, a *mezuzah* is not placed outside of a bathroom.

DEATH & MOURNING OBSERVANCES

PREPARING FOR DEATH

Q: What should I do as the death of a loved one approaches?

Make sure you know the wishes of your loved one, especially when it comes to end-of-life decisions and burial. Please contact the Rabbi and make sure the Rabbi is aware of the condition of your loved one.

Q: Is there a Jewish funeral home in Columbia?

No. However, the Tree of Life has a long-standing relationship with Dunbar Funeral Home and, more recently, Shives Funeral Home. Both understand the requirements of a proper Jewish funeral.

Q: Is pre-planning encouraged?

Yes, absolutely. Funeral homes are happy to work with families to take care of many of the arrangements ahead of time. This is the least stressful way of preparing for the death of a loved one. Pre-planning will also help to ensure that the wishes of the individual are understood and carried out.

Q: What is the Jewish belief concerning organ donation?

There are two conflicting beliefs concerning organ donation. Traditional Jewish law required an individual to be buried with all of his or her parts. However, it is also a mitzvah to save a life. Therefore, especially within Reform Judaism, organ donation is acceptable and encouraged.

AT THE TIME OF DEATH

Q: What are the first steps to take after the death of an immediate family member?

Contact the Rabbi and the Funeral Home. The Rabbi is your resource in this difficult time. The Rabbi is instrumental in planning the funeral and in assisting you and your family in handling the time of mourning. The funeral home will make arrangements to pick up and care for the body of your loved one.

Q: When is a Jewish funeral usually held?

The goal is always to bury the deceased as soon as possible. For our ancestors, that often meant burial on the same day as one died. However, today as our families are more spread out, that is nearly impossible. Typically a funeral will take place within one to three days after death, which should provide enough time for families and friends to gather for the service.

A Jewish funeral is not held on Shabbat (Friday evening or Saturday) or on a major Jewish holiday. It typically takes place either in the morning or afternoon.

Q: Where is a Jewish funeral service held?

Typically, there are three possibilities. The first is to have the funeral service in the sanctuary. The sanctuary is available to any TOL member or family and is very appropriate for a funeral service, especially if the deceased enjoyed coming to services in the sanctuary.

A second possibility is to have the service in the chapel of the funeral home. Most funeral homes have nondenominational chapels available.

A third possibility is to have a graveside service, meaning the service and burial will both take place in the cemetery. There is also a chapel available at the Hebrew Benevolent Society Cemetery for the service.

Q: Is there a Jewish cemetery in Columbia?

Yes. The Hebrew Benevolent Society Cemetery is located in downtown Columbia on Gadsden Street. A historical landmark, this community cemetery was founded in 1822. Membership in the Hebrew Benevolent Society reserves a place in the cemetery and covers perpetual care. Anyone who is Jewish may apply for membership. The right of membership extends to the member's spouse, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, with burial next to the spouse, unmarried children under the age of twenty-one years, and children over the age of twenty-one who have disabilities and are financially dependent upon the parent. There are also cemeteries owned and administered by Beth Shalom Synagogue on Whaley Street downtown and on Arcadia Lakes Drive.

Q: How are Jews traditionally buried?

Traditionally, Jews are buried below ground. A traditional Jewish casket is all natural, made entirely of wood, as simply as possible, to facilitate the returning of "dust to dust."

Embalming is traditionally not done, nor is it necessary (except for special cases, such as a delay in burial or transporting the body to a different location). Please let the funeral home know that you do not wish the body to be embalmed.

Q: What about cremation?

Jewish custom has traditionally been opposed to cremation for several reasons. However, the choice of cremation or a traditional burial is seen as a matter of personal choice. If the family of the deceased chooses cremation, the ashes may be buried in the Hebrew Benevolent Society cemetery, but not in an Orthodox cemetery. Burial of the ashes is recommended.

The funeral service itself is the same whether the body is being buried or cremated.

Q: What about autopsy?

In general, Judaism traditionally discourages an autopsy as it delays the funeral and burial. However, an autopsy may be done for the clear purpose of increasing medical knowledge. Also, in certain cases, an autopsy might be required by law – in which case, Judaism defers to the law of the land.

Q: What is the Chevra Kadisha?

The *Chevra Kadisha* (literally “the holy community” or traditional Jewish burial society) is a group of Jewish individuals from each congregation in Columbia who prepare a body for burial. There is a men’s committee and a women’s committee. The body is prepared simply and reverently with no gossip or chat, and prayers and psalms are recited. The body is washed, all make-up is removed, and the body is dressed in a simple white linen garment or shroud. Simple personal requests, such as whether or not to remove a wedding ring, are honored.

In Columbia, the *Chevra Kadisha* is under the sponsorship of Beth Shalom Synagogue. There is a charge to the family, which is paid to the funeral home who donates it to the *Chevra Kadisha*. The *Chevra Kadisha* provides the shroud.

Please let the Rabbi know immediately following the death if you wish the *Chevra Kadisha* to prepare the body.

THE JEWISH FUNERAL

Q: What is the purpose of the Jewish funeral?

The purpose of the Jewish funeral service is: (a) to bring the family and mourners together, (b) to help the mourners accept the death of a loved one and to begin to say good-bye, and (c) to thank God for the gift of life, specifically the life of this loved one.

Q: What is *keriah*?

“*Keriah*” literally means “tearing.” *Keriah* is a very old Jewish tradition. Before the funeral service begins, there is a *keriah* ceremony, during which the family members of the deceased tear a black mourner’s ribbon that is then placed on the family member’s clothing – it is an exterior symbol of mourning. Mourners may choose to wear the *keriah* ribbon throughout *shiva* or even *sheloshim* (see below).

Q: Are there flowers at a Jewish funeral?

While Jewish custom frowns on the presence of flowers at a funeral because their presence covers up the sadness that accompanies death, there is no reason not to have

flowers, particularly if they were meaningful to the deceased. Jewish custom encourages memorials that benefit the living and perpetuate the memory of the deceased, such as donations to a favorite cause, rather than elaborate displays.

Q: Are open caskets permitted during the funeral service?

Traditionally the casket is always closed during a Jewish funeral service. Keep in mind that traditionally the body is not being preserved nor made up with cosmetics or fancy clothes. Those who wish to see the body of the deceased can make arrangements to view the body before the service.

Q: Who may serve as pallbearers?

It is considered a great honor to be chosen as a pallbearer, either active or honorary. Traditionally, pallbearers are chosen from among those who were close to the deceased. Both men and women may serve as pallbearers.

Q: Why do we conclude a funeral service with the placing of earth over the casket?

This is the last physical act we can do for a loved one who has died. We are placing a blanket of earth over the deceased to help him/her to rest in peace.

There are many traditions that go along with this practice. Usually family places the first few shovels of earth over the casket after it has been placed within the grave. Then friends and others are invited to participate.

Some have the tradition of holding the shovel upside down to show that we are in no rush to bury the deceased and say good-bye. Often the shovel is not passed from one person to the next but is instead returned to the pile of dirt.

Sometimes a simple layer of earth is placed over the casket. Some families wish to partially or completely fill the grave with earth.

Q: What happens after the funeral?

After the conclusion of the service, the family and mourners will often greet guests. This can be done in the cemetery or at the site of the service. Often, the family and guests are invited to return to the house of mourning. It is traditional for friends to bring food to the home for the family. The Tree of Life Sisterhood is also very helpful in providing a condolence meal following a funeral. If a family would like for the Sisterhood to provide a condolence meal, they should inform the Rabbi.

Some follow a tradition of placing a pitcher of water and paper towels outside of the home for guests to wash their hands after having been in the cemetery before entering the home.

JEWISH MOURNING PRACTICES

Q: What is *shiva*?

“Shiva” literally means “seven” – it is the name of the seven-day period of mourning that begins with the day of the funeral. During *shiva*, mourners are encouraged to take time off from work or school and to focus on being a mourner. Some mourners remain at home for the majority of *shiva*.

Shiva is traditionally a week, though some mourners may choose to observe a shorter mourning period. The first three days are considered the most intense days of mourning.

Q: What is a *shiva minyan*?

It is a custom to recite the Mourner’s Kaddish prayer for a loved one during *shiva*. Traditionally this prayer is not recited by oneself. Therefore, people are often invited to the house of mourning to join the mourners for a short evening or afternoon service that will conclude with the recitation of Kaddish. It is considered a mitzvah to attend such a service and thus provide support and company for those in mourning.

A *shiva minyan* may also take place at the Temple, usually in the late afternoon or early evening.

The first *shiva minyan* traditionally takes place on the same day of the funeral. Some families may choose to have additional *minyanim* for the first three days of *shiva* or for the entire *shiva* period.

Q: What do I do on Shabbat during *shiva*?

Mourners are encouraged to attend services on the Shabbat during *shiva*. The name of the deceased will be read before reciting Kaddish at the end of the service. Again, this gives the community a chance to greet the mourners and to express their condolences.

Q: What is *sheloshim*?

“*Sheloshim*” literally means thirty – it is the name of the 30-day mourning period that begins with the funeral and includes *shiva*. After the conclusion of *shiva*, over the following three weeks, the mourner transitions back into a more regular routine. Throughout *sheloshim*, the name of the deceased will be recited at Shabbat services

before Kaddish. Many people choose to refrain from participating in social or happy occasions during *sheloshim*.

Q: What is an “unveiling” ceremony?

Typically a marker is placed at the grave of a loved one. The headstone or foot stone includes the name of the deceased (in English and/or in Hebrew) along with the dates of birth and of death. When the stone is installed, it is usually covered with a cloth. The unveiling ceremony includes uncovering and dedicating the stone memorial.

Usually an unveiling ceremony occurs around the first *yahrzeit* or anniversary of death for a loved one and thus marks the conclusion of the year of mourning. However, one does not have to wait an entire year. Traditionally an unveiling does not occur until after the conclusion of *sheloshim* at the earliest.

Q: How do I purchase a plaque for the Memorial Boards in the sanctuary?

Some families choose to place plaques on the Memorial Boards, located in the Temple sanctuary. These plaques usually have the name of the deceased with dates of birth and death. To purchase a memorial plaque, please contact the Temple office, which will provide the form to fill out as well information about costs. The plaque can be put up at any time. A plaque dedication ceremony may take place privately or during a Shabbat evening worship service after consulting with the Rabbi.

Q: How do I mark a *yahrzeit*?

There are many *yahrzeit* traditions. Some families choose to light a *yahrzeit* candle on the anniversary day of the death of a loved one. During Shabbat services, the names of all TOL members and relatives whose anniversary of death occurs that week (Sunday through Saturday) are mentioned before the recitation of kaddish. If there is a plaque on the Memorial Board, the plaque will be lit up on the Shabbat when the name is mentioned.

It is also a custom to make a donation to the Temple to mark the *yahrzeit* of a loved one. Donations may be made to provide the flowers at Shabbat services that week or to support any of the Temple funds in memory of a loved one.

Q: What is *Yizkor*?

We have four *Yizkor* or Memorial Services during the year: on Yom Kippur afternoon and during the Shalosh Regalim, the pilgrimage holidays of Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot when, biblically, the Jewish people went to the Temple in Jerusalem.

During our Yizkor service on Yom Kippur, we list the names of all those who have died in a printed Book of Memory that includes the names of loved ones whom members especially wish to remember.

During our Yizkor service on Yom Kippur, we also light up all the plaques on our Memorial Boards.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

HELPFUL WEBSITES

We recommend these websites of the Reform Movement, which contain wonderful information on a variety of subjects:

- www.reformjudaism.org
- www.urj.org (Union for Reform Judaism)

GENERAL JEWISH RESOURCE BOOKS

- *Every Person's Guide to Judaism* by Stephen Einstein and Lydia Kukoff (URJ Press, 1989)
- *The Jewish Home: A Guide for Jewish Living* by Daniel B. Syme (URJ Press, 2004)
- *The Jewish Home Advisor* by Alfred J. Kolatch (Jonathan David Publishers, Inc., 1998)
- *Jewish Literacy* by Rabbi Joseph Telushkin (William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991)
- *Jewish Living* by Mark Washofsky (UAHC Press, 2001)

LIFE CYCLE SPECIFIC BOOKS

- *Gates of Mitzvah: A Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle* (CCAR Press, 1979)
- *The New Jewish Baby Book* by Anita Diamant (Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005)
- *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics: A Practical Family Guide to Coming of Age Together* edited by Cantor Helen Leneman (Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996)
- *Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah* by Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin (Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996)
- *The New Jewish Wedding* by Anita Diamant (A Fireside Book published by Simon & Schuster, 1985)
- *Beyond Breaking the Glass: A Spiritual Guide to Your Jewish Wedding* by Rabbi Nancy Wiener (CCAR Press, 2001)
- *A Jewish Mourner's Handbook* by Rabbi Ron H. Isaacs and Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky (KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1991)
- *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Comfort* by Dr. Ron Wolfson (Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996)
- *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* by Maurice Lamm (Jonathan David Publishers, Inc., 1969)
- *Living a Jewish Life* by Anita Diamant (Harper, 1996)
- *Choosing a Jewish Life* by Anita Diamant (Schoken Books, 2016)